

On the Last Night of Hogwarts

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Sequel to [On the First Night of Hogwarts](#). Severus has grown up and looks forward to being his professor's colleague, but she has news for him that will change everything.

Plum Blossoms

Chapter 1 of 1

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It is highly recommended that you read [On the First Night of Hogwarts](#) before embarking on this brief addition to the tale.

He stood in her doorway, preening in his new robes. "I did it," he announced. "*Hermione*. I'm your colleague now. *Professor* Severus Snape."

He had expected her approval and congratulations, and was disappointed by the small, forced smile on her face. "I'm pleased for you, Severus; of course I am. But..." she rose from her chair. "Severus, I have to leave Hogwarts."

The young man fell back a step, catching hold of the doorpost a moment before he could fall and humiliate himself entirely. "What? Why?" he demanded.

"Something's about to happen; I can't still be here when it does." Her face took on that distant look he'd seen many times over the years and never quite understood. "I've stayed two years longer than I should have to begin with; Professor Dumbledore will want my head when he finds out, and I'd rather not know if he'd remove it or poke around in it."

"What is it? What's going on? *What's* going to happen that could be worse than it's already been?!" They'd survived the rise of the Dark Lord. She'd seen him through a battleground of pain and death and betrayal...some of which had been by his own hand. He could feel fear begin its icy formation at the top of his spine.

"Oh, Severus, I'm sorry. It's not as bad as all that," she smiled, though her usually warm brown eyes were bleak. "It's my first magic. And my appearance on the roll of students-to-be."

Severus's mind went entirely blank and he groped for some sort of coherent thought amidst the nothingness. "Your first magic," he repeated stupidly. "Professor Granger, you've been a teacher here for the last bleeding *decade*." And in that decade, she'd been his friend, his second crush, his mentor, his *centre*. Mother and aunt and sister and... She'd nursed him after that horrifying episode with Lupin and shared his fury at Dumbledore's judgment. She'd remained steadfast in the wake of his rejection of everything she stood for in favour of the Dark Lord. She'd held him during those awful, awful days and nights following Lily's death. Lily's *murder*.

She'd fucking *been there*.

"I... I..." He'd never seen her at such a loss for words, and that alarmed him almost more than anything. He watched her right hand rub her left wrist, the way it did when she was upset. She stared down at her hands, no longer meeting his eyes. "My true birthday is 19 September. Nineteen... seventy-nine. I'll be two years old soon. I'll summon a book I want from a top shelf. My parents will explain it away as it overbalancing and falling oddly. In several years, Minerva will come to my house and explain everything. I'll grow up alongside Harry Potter. I'll fight alongside him. I'll see that *bastard* die. I'll see..." she broke off sharply. "I'll see a lot of things I wish I never had," she

finished tiredly. "And at the end, when it is all over, I'll take a Time-Turner, modify it, and come back. Here. To help teach a little Slytherin firstie named Severus Snape."

He gaped, his eyes staring and his open mouth giving an unattractive display of the crooked teeth she'd never managed to convince him to fix. He tightened his grip as his knees threatened again to give way. Somehow, he never doubted that she spoke the truth.

She always had.

Snape was an intelligent young man; once the initial shock passed, the implications and ramifications of her words spun through his brain in the flash of a lightning bolt. He stiffened. "You *bitch*," he hissed. "You manipulative, little *bitch*. You knew. You *knew* everything that would happen. You knew about Lupin. About my family. About *Lily*. You knew what I would do, and you knew what would happen because of it! And you just *let it happen*! You did *nothing*! You let her die! You let me betray her! *Do you have any idea of what you've done to me?*"

He raged at her, finally coming to face her across her desk, his wand in a shaking hand. She didn't even try to wipe away the spittle that had escaped to land on her hair and the back of her hand.

"Yes," she whispered, still refusing to look at him. "I knew. I've had the roll of the honoured dead engraved on my soul for a decade and more now, Severus."

"Don't you *dare* call me that now, *Professor*."

"Do you think it doesn't hurt me?" she demanded, her hand clamped tightly around her wrist. "Do you think I *enjoyed* seeing Lily and James die? Seeing you in all of the agony you've gone through? Knowing how many people will die in the end? Do you think it's easy for me, putting faces and souls to names I knew only from photographs and memorials? I've lost too many people I loved, Severus, and now, I have...I *will* lose even more. And I know who and when and how. And I know that changing it...changing *any* of it...is a risk I cannot begin to consider taking."

Her face was hidden by that god-damned hair of hers, but her hands... His wand faltered to see her nails biting into her wrist, the hand darkening from the cessation of blood. "Then *why?*" he barked, twisting his dismay back into fuel for his anger. "Why come back at all? Or did you need to manipulate me into the 'choices' I made?" All this time, moulding him, guiding him, *manipulating* him into becoming the monster he had become. Leading him to a place where he could believe that betraying his Lily...his lovely, lovely Lily...into the hands of the Dark Lord was his own idea, his own fault.

"Severus!" Her head shot up at that, and showed him the dead whiteness of her complexion...contrasted by a livid swath he had never seen before: a curse scar that jagged across half her face. "Your choices have always been just that: yours," she said tightly. "You made the same choices you made before regardless of my presence here. Damn it, I know this is a shock, but is that how you see me? Is that *truly* how you see me?"

"How in the *hell* am I supposed to know who you are?" Snape screamed, in full fury. "You've *lied* to me for a decade! You *allowed* me to be attacked by a fucking werewolf! You... you...! *Damn* you!"

"I let you make your own damned choices," she finished, her voice low. The resignation in the face of his anger pulled Severus up short. He watched, fascinated, as her scar darkened, refined, and developed red points. "Severus Snape, did I ever *once* tell you it was a good idea to become a Death Eater? Did I ever lure you into my office and pour propaganda into your ears? Did I... did I ever tell you to keep loving Lily Evans because someday she'd love you back?" He reared back, his face flaming an ugly, mottled red. "Meddling with time is... uncertain at best, Severus. If I had told you to keep the prophecy to yourself, would I have saved lives or lost them? If I had saved Lily, would you then be a Death Eater still...a *true* Death Eater...or would you be dead, or would you have had to kill her yourself? Would you have believed me if I had told you back then what would happen? Somehow, I don't think so. Even the little I've done... that I thought I'd done..."

"You still made the same choices, Severus, the same ones I knew you would make. My presence here hasn't made a jot of difference. Unless..."

""Unless?""

"Unless it's made a difference to *you*. *You* are why I came back."

"Me." The single syllable was dripping in disbelieving sarcasm.

Hermione sighed. "Yes, you, you bloody ungrateful bat." She seemed to somehow collapse in her chair, her bones and muscles refusing to hold her up any further. "You, *I* think, are the crux upon which this war turns." She waved away his sneering objections. "Oh, Harry is the final battle, the hero, et cetera, et cetera, ad infinitum, yes. But he is what he is, and that means he wasn't...*will not*...be able to do anything else. *You*, Severus, are the dark horse, the trick card, the maverick. You dance on both sides of a line most people can't conceive of crossing, and you do it with superlative skill." A half-bark of laughter escaped her. "God knows *I* couldn't do it. Could you honestly see me trying to fool Voldemort into believing me Dark?" The young man was startled into his own snort of laughter. Professor Granger had all the subtlety of a bull in a china shop...a very *tiny* china shop. His mental images of her acting like a Dark witch verged on pure pantomime.

"I would have done, though," she said softly, and her gaze returned to her hands. "If I had thought... If I had thought for *one moment* I could do it and spare you... everything, I would've done."

"But why? I don't fucking understand *why*. You claim you don't want to change history, but you're *here*. Your being here could be changing everything, risking the Dark Lord's victory! You're mucking about in *my life*!"

She was silent for a long moment, and his impatience was about to demand the answer again. Then, "I don't know," she said carefully, "if, now, I would make the same decision. I really don't. But I was nineteen, then, fresh from all of the horrible losses, all of the death and destruction and... pain." She smiled a lop-sided, half-hearted smile. "I didn't get this from playing Quidditch, you know." She gestured at her facial scar, now largely a black line jagging and branching across her face from hairline to opposite cheek.

"You might've," he groused, being contrary, trying to avoid the little knots of chagrin. "You're absolute rubbish at Quidditch."

Her smile grew a bit wider, a bit more honest. "Very true, Professor Snape. I *am* rubbish at Quidditch.

"But *this* didn't bother me as much as the deaths did, all of that awful waste, and for what? A single, genocidal megalomaniac. It was just... a waste. And I didn't feel like I could stand any more waste, and..." Her fingers began playing across her wrist again. "I watched you die, Severus," she whispered. "There was nothing I could do but watch you die. All of that blood, that awful, awful blood. Red. Brilliant, shimmering, ruby red everywhere. And silver... your memories seeping from your brain, dripping onto the floor, quicksilver puddles on warped, rotting floorboards..."

She buried her face in her hands and wept while Severus watched, stricken. It was appalling enough to see the professor like this...throughout everything, he had *never* seen her break down...but to have that glimpse of his own fate... 'Gruesome' was a painfully inadequate word for it. A surge of despair eddied through him. Whatever he chose to do...and from now on, he'd probably second-guess himself interminably...his life would end as a bloody, mangled mess. Did it matter that the 'Light' would win? At the moment, it didn't feel like it. After all, what difference would it make to a dead man?

But Professor Granger was crying over him. Strangely, it made a difference to *her*. "Why, Professor?" he prompted, more softly than he had done.

She snuffled, and wiped her cheeks with her hands like a child. "I'm sorry; I didn't mean..." Snuffling again, she yanked a drawer open and pulled a handkerchief from its depths. The habitual, absurdly *non sequitur* question of how she did that wisped through his mind. Only Professor Granger could open that drawer and find precisely what she wanted; students had surreptitiously tried for a decade...it wasn't locked...and only come up with the most useless rubbish imaginable. (Lucius had tried to unearth a pair of her knickers and had emerged, disgusted, with a dozen half-eaten, mouldy take-away cartons. Bella, with who knew what on *her* agenda, had produced a sack full of plastic, bird-shaped whistles.) He shook himself back into the present. One of the pillars of his life was crumbling before his eyes, and he could still chase after childhood riddles. But he waited as she wiped her eyes and blew her nose...no dainty dabs and sniffles for Professor Granger. She sighed shakily, and her expression became distant again. He suddenly realized that this was her sign of removing herself from the past, protecting against the emotions that could fell dragons.

"You were dead," she reiterated calmly. "You left your memories behind...accidentally or deliberately, I don't know. We collected them; I saw them later. And I was... It was appalling to me, what I saw there. You were so alone, always so alone. You did...you have done and will do...so much for us, and your reward was alienation, manipulation, and despair." He shivered at her words, the image of him they produced, and a part of his mind spun backwards into his past, reimagining his life without Professor Granger. That first night, alone on the stairwell. Would he have continued, cold and alone, or worse, been found by another student? What pitfalls would he have tripped into had she not guided his studies of Dark Arts and Defence? She'd been unhappy...he could discern that now...that he'd wanted to learn such things, but she hadn't tried to hinder him, only to point him in certain directions. With hindsight, he could see a dozen ways by which he would have lost his life or his soul in his single-minded quest for Dark learning; she'd steered him around those without keeping from him the knowledge that had kept him alive.

At least a dozen instances came to him that made him shudder to imagine *alone*.

Lily's abandonment with only Slytherins to 'understand.'

Long, miserable summers with only Tobias for company after his mother died.

All the times the Marauders would have humiliated him.

That night... He probably would have thrown himself from a window...any window high enough...without her. He'd wanted to. He'd felt he deserved it. He couldn't remember how she had convinced him to live.

Would Dumbledore have accepted him had she not argued for him?

And yet she encouraged him to maintain his reservations about and around the old man.

Did he trust her too much?

"You're questioning me again." That bloody prescience of hers; she *always* seemed to catch the slightest changes in his manner and interpret them correctly. "Now that I'm thinking properly, I don't blame you; after all, I taught you to question *everybody*, didn't I?" Her eyes were still sad. The red points of her scar had bloomed larger; they almost looked pretty in a tragic way. Studying him for a moment more, she once again rummaged in her desk, pulling out a vial that she set firmly on her desk in front of her. It was either water or...

"Veritaserum."

"I will if you need me to, Severus," she said gently.

He gave a harsh laugh. "Catch-22." She'd taught him the reference.

"I've known you longer than you have me," she reminded him, "and in some ways, more intimately. Given the givens," she shrugged, "a certain amount of distrust is natural. You were right, after all; what better way to achieve my ends than to mould a young, impressionable child? And these are desperate times, after all. It isn't unlikely I'd have chosen desperate measures.

"I don't want to lose what I came here for, Severus," she said, the barest hint of a plea in her voice. "I won't...don't...think any less of you for needing to protect yourself; you'll need every ounce of self-preservation instinct you can find. If you ask, I'll take it."

"And prove the degree of my faith in you," he added, the words blunt and bleak and heavy.

"And prove that you've been paying *some* attention to what I've been trying to teach you," she retorted with asperity. "Trust has been in very short supply; I know that. And in your position, I think you know it far better than I do." When he said nothing, her eyes closed and her mouth thinned. "Oh, for... *Fine. Males!*" She snatched the bottle, snapped the seal and downed the contents. His gaping shock was met with a glare of a sort he'd never seen on her face for the brief moment before the Veritaserum took hold and her features assumed the blank emotionlessness of being bespelled. His Adam's apple bobbed convulsively in his throat, and the young man could feel the sweat congealing on his hands and the back of his neck.

He swung around and warded the door as heavily as he knew how.

"What..." he gulped. "What is your name?"

"Hermione Jean Granger..."

"I'm afraid."

Her expression was sober behind the tattoo-like scar which she had allowed to deepen across her face. Placing a cup of tea at his elbow, Hermione settled on the other end of the sofa. Her sofa, for she had, afterwards, taken him to her sitting room. "What frightens you so, Severus?"

The firelight played along the angular lines of his face, bringing out the bleakness that mirrored his old teacher's earlier emotions. Only the faint movements of breathing disturbed his stillness. "You..." he began, halted. "I..." he tried again. A slight shift in his muscles betrayed a tightening of his jaw. "I have done such things," he confessed quietly. "Things that possess my nightmares. That make me want to run screaming...except that I can't escape my own skin. Sometimes I wake, and I want nothing more than to... to drink down my supply of belladonna."

"Oh, Severus..."

"And then there are the worse times." His hands tightened, crushing the fabric of his robes, showing the joints up white, and she could feel him hunch into himself. "The times I dream, and I remember, and I *feel*. Feel the power I held in my hands. Feel the joy and... and the thrill and the... the *ecstasy* of it all." He buried his face in his hands, and his fingers tightened as if they could burrow into his skull and dig out the memories there.

"And it was magnificent," Hermione continued softly, "because for once you held the power in your own hands, and it was as though you were God. Because people could live or die or suffer at *your* whim and had to dance to *your* tune. You were in control, rather than being controlled." His hands fell away, boneless, into his lap, and he stared, open-mouthed. She studied him for a moment, then rose to fetch something from a chest by the fireplace. A long, ironwood box, which she opened and held out for him to inspect.

A wand box. He was baffled by its significance and gazed at it until the vague sense of familiarity sharpened. "This is Bella's wand," he said slowly. He recognised the wood, the curvature, though the bend was far more dramatic than he remembered.

"It is," she affirmed and closed the box. "You didn't ask earlier, but this was hers," and Hermione exposed a thin, pale scar on her neck. "And this was hers." The black branch, the red points that looked like nothing so much as tiny flower buds. The slight quirk that just missed her right eye. "And a few more that I'm *not* going to show you," she added with a slight archness in her tone. Her poplin robes rustled slightly as she resumed her seat on the sofa, rather closer than she had been before. "It's a tale I don't particularly want to tell, but the end of it was that I took her wand. I took it, and I used it. Because I had no other." Her small hand rested possessively along the box. "I felt it. That joy, that ecstasy. That power. This wand has been...and will be...used for little else since Bellatrix graduated from Hogwarts. It resonates with it, and I experienced it every time I had to use it.

"And in my youthful hubris, I even tried a Dark spell. It was..." She sighed, and the silence stretched a little longer than it had to. "I learned that it wouldn't take nearly as much as I would have wanted to believe to fall to evil. So I do know something of what you've lived, Severus. And you should know that I respect you immeasurably for having walked that path and mustered the strength of will to turn back."

"Would I have been able to do so without you?" he questioned. "Will I be able to continue without you? I'm realising how much I've put on you, Professor. I've used you as a crutch."

"You've used me as a friend," she corrected. "It's not a crime to lean on someone. Harry, Ron, and I leaned on each other; none of us would have even survived otherwise, let alone succeeded. But you won't *need* me now...I have faith in you if you don't...and you must see that I cannot stay."

"I do." He shuddered inwardly. If Professor Dumbledore knew about the secrets in Professor Granger's brain, there was very little that he wouldn't do to discover them. The old man, for all his aims, had very little compunction or remorse when it came to winning the war. He'd have even less if he found out that his instinct was true and that the war wasn't over yet. Will she, nil she, Dumbledore would pick her brains like a vulture...and he might not care overmuch about what was, or was not, left behind. It had been *possible* for the Longbottoms to have recovered from their torture, but after Dumbledore's interference, his incessant, callous hunt for every single detail of their ordeal, they'd had no chance.

That could not happen to Professor Granger. Hermione. She shouldn't be sacrificed on the altars of his fears and insecurities. She was right. She must go.

"When shall we two meet again?" he misquoted lamely.

"I don't think we can." Her words dropped with ringing finality. "I'm not in the final chapters, Severus, not like this. I never was. I'll have to do what I can to lie low. Move to the Continent perhaps. Or further."

"So you'll leave me to die," he said flatly, and regretted it as soon as he verbalized the thought. Low. Unworthy. She didn't deserve that guilt.

The breath she took trembled, rattled like an aspen leaf and for that moment, he could see the girl she had been, caught up in a war that had been none of her making. "Professor, I... What else can I *do*?"

It was his guilt now as well as hers. He shook his head. "I'm sorry. Hermione. It's not your fault that I chose damnation."

"Don't!" she snapped out. "Don't you dare..."

The corner of his mouth quirked in self-deprecating mockery. "I can't seem to help it, Professor. Shouldn't I at least acknowledge my talent for royally fucking up?"

"Language," she snapped with a professor's reflexes, but her expression was much the same, and Severus couldn't help but wonder exactly how much they had rubbed off on each other over the years. "You're not alone in that, Severus. I'd tell you tales, but that would be cheating, wouldn't it?"

He shrugged. "So cheat. I would hardly think a few tales are going to be responsible for stopping my death." When she simply gaped at him, he squirmed uncomfortably in his seat. The brilliant reds of her scar, like so many flowers of blood, seemed to stare him in the face just as intently as she did. "Well, you don't have to..." he muttered.

"Stop death..." she repeated slowly. "A stopper in death..." Her face bloomed into a grin that combined illumination with mischief and triumph. "Severus, as always, you are fucking *brilliant*!" She launched herself up and caught him in an impetuous embrace that he was too stunned to do anything about. Something quickened in him that he was helpless to identify, nor was he given the chance. Hermione hauled him bodily to his feet. "Come on, my bloody magnificent Potions Master! We have a pantry to plunder, cauldrons to brew, and so many plans to make that Time itself will be hoodwinked, never mind Headmaster I-Know-Fucking-Everything Dumbledore!" She whooped, and he found himself virtually dragged down the castle's corridors. The total volte-face left his mind spinning, and he barely noticed the catcalls and commiserations of the various portraits.

She flew from pantry to table so that he almost expected to see her literally levitating as she laid out the ingredients. A portion of his mind catalogued her choices, analysed and brought about the dawn of comprehension before she stopped in front of him, vibrating with excitement. This, too, he marvelled, dazed, was the girl she had been: eager, bursting with life and the thrill of discovery and ability. Before she could say a word, everything crystallised for him, fitted into the places they should have done from the beginning.

They were much of a height, and it was less awkward than he might have expected to lean forward for that swift touch of lips that took as much courage as he could muster. The light in her eyes didn't change, merely warmed, and her hands lifted to cup his face.

"You're mine, Severus," and here a bit of impish humour invaded, "as strange as that may be." Strange, indeed. As strange as time travel and magic and love and hate. Her gaze intensified. "My boy. My professor. My wizard. And I will never leave you. When you need me, I'll be there.

"Always."

"Always," he repeated softly.

The line and flower of her scar blossomed across his vision: a symbol of survival. A symbol of hope. For his future. For theirs.

ANs: So, it's only taken four years to produce part two of this (conceived) trilogy. With any luck, the final part won't take that long, but with great honesty, I would recommend that you not hold your breath. *sigh* Long time readers of my work should be well aware of my track record in this regard... I do hope, however, that this small addition is in some way satisfying as it advances their history. Thank you all for reading.